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ABSTRACT

The adult education activities of the government of Singapore have emphasized campaigns to help its citizens adjust to the rapid pace of industrialization and modernization. Various government ministries and private industries are indirectly involved in adult education through training programs in vocational skills and agricultural extension programs. From its inception in 1960 until recently, the Adult Education Board (the major professional adult education agency) concentrated on the eradication of illiteracy and the teaching of a second language. The Board has recently branched out into self-improvement and enrichment courses and the innovative use of radio and TV in order to attract and serve better-educated adult students. The extra-mural studies department of the University of Singapore emphasizes job advancement through vocational and professional education. The People's Association operates nearly 200 community centers, all over Singapore, that offer recreational and cultural enrichment courses. The Association's expansion in collaboration with the Adult Education Board is suggested. It is recommended that all adult education activities in Singapore be better coordinated and developed. In the interests of international cooperation in these areas, the Adult Education Board is organizing a regional meeting of ASEAN countries in 1972. (KM)

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UNESCO: 3RD WORLD CONFERENCE ON ADULT EDUCATION

TOKYO, 25 JULY - 7 AUGUST, 1972

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STATEMENT BY SINGAPORE DELEGATION

In Singapore a practical and pragmatic use of education may be discerned in our government's efforts at orientating people to the needs for maintaining our development, and adjusting themselves to the consequences of this development.

At a general grass-roots level, Singapore witnesses frequent and regular public campaigns. During these campaigns, radio, TV, the press, banners, posters, leaflets, the cinema, and other devices like elocution, poster and logo competitions are used to arouse a consciousness and a serious consideration of the themes of the campaigns. Examples of such campaigns have been: Keep Singapore clean, keep Singapore green, anti-pollution, industrial safety, family planning, dental care, anti-drug, even anti-mosquito campaigns, and so on. Public education activity during such campaigns reaches out widely and quite profoundly into the community. This is one way we try to make our people react as a community to the pace of modernisation.

Before dealing with other more formal adult education provisions, there are yet other non-formal occasions, or even social experience situations, arising out of government development programmes, as a result of which adjustments to new styles of living have to be made. In Singapore two features, especially, of national development having such results come to mind. One is the rapid pace of industrialisation; another is the impact of our housing schemes on the changing life of our

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people. In 1968-69, we were facing serious problems of unemployment; today there are more jobs (especially requiring industrial skills) than there are workers: this indicates the circumstances of our economic industrial development. The last decade or so has seen rapid growth of housing. It is in this last decade, especially, that half our population have moved into new satellite towns of high-rise flats built by government. This large re-location of population has forced on our people an awareness of the need for adjustment to the demands of development. The trends today indicate that the problems (requiring assistance in their solution from continuing education) that will arise from industrialisation and new housing will require very agile responses indeed.

Coming to more recognisable, because more organised, adult education activity, we must not forget the great activity that is going on, under the aegis of various government ministries, for the implementation and improvement of their own domestic, institutional functions. The civil service trains various levels of administrative workers through the staff training institute. The defence department does not only have to train soldiers, but also inculcate sophisticated skills for the manning of modern instruments of defence-skills which will also be useful in civilian life.

At the same time, education has to proceed apace in the Singapore armed forces to arouse in our national servicemen a clear awareness also of their civic obligations, and the necessity for personal development for civic living. The Ministry of Labour runs TWI courses; and other forms of continuing education are also organised by other ministries, notably in the Primary Production Department which runs extension programmes, especially for pig and poultry breeders.

Correspondingly, in private, commercial and industrial sectors, firms are doing the same thing for their employees, for their own working purposes.

In all these areas, however, there is little consciousness of the continuing education nature of the activities, so that the full resources of adult education are not tapped (for example, by way of methods of teaching, or of organising a learning situation).

At the same time, there are the adult education agencies which declare they are in adult education, because they are fully aware they are in adult education, and understand in a full-time, professional sense, that theirs is adult education or continuing education activity. Examples of such agencies are the Adult Education Board, the extra-mural studies department of the University of Singapore, the Y.M.C.A.'s (and other organisations with religious affiliations), organisations connected with family planning, professional organisations, and so on; and, indeed, also government agencies like the National Productivity Centre (which organises courses to upgrade skills at the factory floor-level, including supervisory skills), the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (which organises quality control courses), and the like.

Out of the multiplicity of such organisations, I would like to throw light particularly on the work of the Singapore Adult Education Board. The Adult Education Board and its preoccupations mirror the trends in the development of adult education in Singapore. The Board was set up in 1960, the year of the Montreal Conference. Its initial energies were directed towards the eradication of illiteracy and the teaching of a second language. At the same time, general education classes were organised to provide opportunities for out-of-school youths to complete their secondary education.

Later, with literacy as a receding problem, attention was focussed more on providing opportunity for the acquisition of vocational skills. Incidentally, it was announced this year that the literacy rate in Singapore was 75%. In 1972, also, 99% of the children of age (6) eligible for primary school entry did, indeed, start their schooling. Of the children of primary school-going age, namely 6-12 years, 95% are in primary schools. With entry into secondary school possible for all who qualify through the primary school leaving examinations, with other (vocational) type schooling open for those who do not wish (or who do not qualify) to enter the academic streams, with national service providing another avenue for continuing education, with prospects of apprentice training (perhaps more formalised in future), with constant exposure to mass media, we hope that the problem of literacy will not be a serious one for us, although we must be alert to it.

So much so that the Adult Education Board has in the recent past been able to apply itself to the provision of other types of courses for self-improvement. Such courses as flower-arrangement, cooking, sewing, pottery, art, photography, home decoration, cosmetic skill, motor maintenance, and so on, are aimed at injecting a little graciousness into the condition of living especially those residing in high-rise flats. This trend has to be emphasised, and a greater variety of provisions contrived, with investigation into the feasibility of different situations and formats more appropriate for socio-psychological conditions prevailing.

Reference has already been made in our country report to new and better educated clientele for adult education who must be catered for in the near future. Such are the people who are graduating from our schools and colleges, and an increasing number of older people finding more opportunity for leisure.

For the mass of such people other means besides courses characterised by classroom conditions have to be used. Radio and television springs to mind, and certainly more imaginative use of such media, and allied to other adult education approaches, should be applied. Currently, one of the activities of the Adult Education Board has been to organise radio or TV series of talks. Such talks are delivered to a live, participating audience, but later telecast or broadcast to a large audience. Finally, the contents of such a series are incorporated in a publication, in the hope of casting the net wider. The possibilities of further exploitation of radio and TV should indeed hold up a world of profit and delight to the imaginative adult educator. Besides the Adult Education Board, the broadcasting authorities themselves also present adult education programmes of the enrichment variety.

For other people, the university could cast its net wider to involve yet others in its extramural provisions. In Singapore, a characteristic of the university's attention to adult education is its preoccupation with a goods and services approach. And in this, a notable phenomenon is a high percentage of enrolments (over 40% in the last semester) for courses in the business and economics field. Other preferences (15%) are for courses related to science and technology. Still other enrolments too show a very ready response to courses which are considered to hold relevance to possibilities of job advancement. I would hope, personally and passionately, that though extramural programmes seem to be orientated in such an unabashed fashion to job preoccupations, the discussions in such courses, the meeting of people in an academic context, and methods of analysis and presentation used, would make for a broadening educational experience for participants. I wonder, though, in the present circumstances, if more should not be done in the university, to relate continuing education to the human condition in such a way as to transcend material preoccupations.

While referring to various ways in which the Adult Education Board and other agencies may cater to a wider clientele, or induce a wider response, we have also to bear in mind large numbers of people, especially in the not-so-well educated or in the lower income groups (and among these, especially women) who, somehow or other, have not numbered among the past clientele for more or less formal education for adults. In this respect, if the traditional adult education approaches (or those oft used in the past) do not seem to have been successful, then obviously new approaches are called for. I agree with what one delegate said yesterday (if I may paraphrase and modify a little what was said) that adult education situations organised by voluntary or community organisations familiar to people, may succeed in contriving for such people a conscious experience of continuing education, and in this way wean them into a habit of continuing education, who may not otherwise participate in it.

In Singapore, one agency familiar to people at the mass organisation level is the People's Association. This Association runs community centres all over our island - nearly 200 of such centres. Activity at such centres is of a recreational or cultural order - sport, games, excursions, folk-dancing, cooking, sewing, and so on. It would be natural for the People's Association to move more into adult education, especially in collaboration with the Adult Education Board - but into adult education also different from and in addition to the present recreational orientation.

Mr. President, there appears to be plenty of busy-ness in Singapore in the adult education field. Perhaps (and may this statement be considered as a question?), what we have to do is give more attention to the pedagogical (or in adult education terms - the androgogical) aspects, to coordination, to thinking out the full possibilities of development. Perhaps, this thinking should also be untrammelled by the weight of the traditions of the formal

(in-school) educational establishment (where such traditions may not be relevant to adult education). We hope that we may be able to learn from others, so that we may bring wider perspectives to bear upon the solution of our indigenous problems. But we feel that, in international cooperation, smaller regional groupings for the purpose of exchanging experiences in a more intimate manner, should be encouraged.

With this in mind, the Adult Education Board, with the approval of the Singapore government, is organising, this year, a regional meeting in Singapore, of ASEAN countries. I am glad that all ASEAN countries invited have accepted.

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